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## **Homeland Security to review local grant rules**

By William New, [National Journal's Technology Daily](#)

Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson agreed Thursday to a congressional request to review minimum requirements that are attached to federal grants to local "first responders" to emergencies.

Testifying before the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, Hutchinson, who heads border and transportation security at the Homeland Security Department, also said that millions of dollars in federal grants for homeland security remain unused by the states and that the states themselves are the problem in disbursing the aid.

Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Harold Rogers, R-Ky., reacted by saying that if states are the problem, Congress might consider bypassing them to directly fund local first responders. "The states ought to be on notice that the clock is ticking," Rogers said.

Rogers called on Hutchinson to look at the minimum requirements and report on whether he thinks they are necessary, how to impose them and what they should be. Hutchinson committed the department to providing some degree of review of the requirements within 30 days, and suggested the requirements might make a good topic for a hearing.

Rogers also said he sees a need for the establishment of a baseline level of security that all localities must achieve to meet federal standards. Hutchinson said a department fear is that five years from now the funds will have been spent and it may be difficult to account for how they were spent.

The use of federal grants is based on state vulnerability assessments, and Congress built flexibility into the system to allow for varying local situations, Hutchinson said.

The priorities currently associated with first-responder grants target the ability of communications systems to interact and the willingness of localities to support each other in emergencies, he said.

Hutchinson also took more criticism for the department's decision to develop a new fingerprint database of potential terrorists that is technologically incompatible with an existing FBI database containing 44 million names. "I'm very concerned about this," Rogers said. "We've got to find an answer here."

In particular, Rogers cited concern that border agents cannot access the FBI database. Hutchinson said that in terms of border control, the Bush administration views the problem as "unacceptable" and plans to fix it by the end of the year.

The fix consists of creating parallel access to the FBI database so border agents who apprehend aliens can check their information against it. So far, 20 border stations have the capability, and another 100 are expected by year's end.